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Op-Ed
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On Tuesday Connecticut voters will head to the polls for an historic election. Every election is important and the candidates from all parties have undoubtedly been doing everything they can to capture the attention and interest of voters. But this election is especially important because voters across Connecticut, from the state's largest cities to the smallest towns will help usher in anew era of voting. Optical scan technology will replace the old lever machines, random audits of election results will guarantee accuracy, and a specially customized vote-by-phone system will ensure that voters with disabilities are able to vote privately and independently.

Why is Connecticut overhauling its electoral process? It's a question I get asked at every public voting machine demonstration my office conducts – more than 200 so far. The answer is actually pretty simple. The federal Help America Vote Act requires that all voting systems produce a permanent paper record with a manual audit capacity. Connecticut's lever machines do not meet this requirement, and therefore, are no longer suitable for elections in this state.

Enter optical scan technology – safe, simple, and secure. Voters check in at the polling place and receive a paper ballot. They make their selections by filling in the oval next to a candidate's name and then put the ballot through a scanner where the votes are tabulated. The paper ballot then drops into a locked ballot box where it can be used to verify election results.

Most important, the new optical scan technology provides a paper trail for every vote cast. This is a very significant safeguard for voters because it provides every voter with the opportunity to review and change their ballot before it is cast and the assurance that their vote is counted properly because ballots can and will be audited after every election in Connecticut.

My office, in collaboration with Registrars of Voters and other election officials, has been preparing the state for this change for well over a year. 3,000 election officials and poll workers have received comprehensive training in over 200 sessions held in more than 30 regional training centers across the state. In addition to the 200 public demonstrations we have conducted, local Registrars, League of Women Voters and community groups have also conducted voter outreach and education. As a result of these combined efforts, Connecticut residents are ready to vote in the 21st century.

While other states like California struggle with touch screen voting machines that lack verifiable paper trails, Connecticut has chosen a system with a proven track record. Optical scan voting is the most common form of voting technology in America today, with a majority of counties nationwide voting on optical scan machines. During the 2006

general election, optical scan technology was used in 1,752 counties nationwide and we join our New England neighbors Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island in using this technology.

In Connecticut, a number of towns already used optical scan technology. Twenty-five towns successfully used the optical scan machines in the November 2006 elections. In May of this year, 13 more towns or boroughs held their elections using the new voting machines and this past September, 23 additional towns utilized the new machines during the primary.

As Connecticut makes the transition to new optical scan voting machines, it is imperative that voters have confidence that their vote will be recorded securely and accurately. This past legislative session, my office fought hard for passage of Public Act 07-194, An Act Concerning the Integrity and Security of the Voting Process. This law requires Connecticut to conduct random audits of 10% of all polling districts. This means that ballots will be hand counted and compared with machine totals.

Tuesday's elections mark not the beginning but the culmination of a long and thorough process to ensure that all of Connecticut's voters are ready and able to vote in the 21st century. While change is never easy, the new safeguard to voters that comes with a paper trail - and the confidence voters can now have that their votes are counted properly – are vital improvements to our democratic process. The result is that Connecticut is now a nationwide leader in ensuring that elections are secure and accurate.

Susan Bysiewicz
Secretary of the State